

**University Avenue and Capitol/Downtown Joint Central Corridor Task Force Meeting
14 February 2007
Central Corridor Resource Center
Meeting Summary**

University Task Force members present: Reggie Aligada (co-chair), Julie Causey (co-chair), Marilyn Porter (co-chair), Betty Charles, James Erkel, Joan Grzywinski, Courtney Henry, Vatou Her, Seitu Jones, Richard Kleinbaum, Nieeta Presley, Jonathan Sage-Martinson, Robert Straughn, Anne White

University Task Force members absent: Veronica Burt, Juan Linares, Byron Moore, Mai Thor, Bao Vang, Brian Winkelaar

Capitol/Downtown Task Force members present: Paul Mohrbacher (co-chair), Kristina Smitten (co-chair), Jerry Hersman, Patricia Lamb, Michael Noble, Deborah Rathman, Steve Schmidt, Diane Thormodsgard

Capitol/Downtown Task Force members absent: TaCumba Aiken, John Bennett, Michael Burns, Larry Englund, Jose Gonzalez, Kim Hyers, T. Rhys Leger, Craig Lien, Philip Mason

Staff present: Christina Danico, Donna Drummond, Shawntera Hardy, Allen Lovejoy, Jess Rosenfeld, Va-Megn Thoj, Lucy Thompson, Yang Zhang, Sarah Zorn

Others present: Jo Haberman, Karri Plowman, Carol Swenson, Karen Lyons, Tim Griffin, George Johnson, Charlene Zimmer, Monique Mackenzie, Paul Mandell, Jeff Patterson, Jim Barton, Joe Samuel, Dennis A. Presley, Sr., Melanie Hare, George Dark, Bryan Bowen, Larry Fasching, Dan Kravetz, Sarah Penman, Robert Ferguson

The meeting was called to order by co-chair Julie Causey. She welcomed everyone and invited them to view the presentation boards around the room as the meeting would focus on the content of the *Draft Central Corridor Development Strategy*. Introductions of the task force members, City staff and audience members were made.

Melanie Hare and George Dark from Urban Strategies presented an overview of the *Draft Central Corridor Development Strategy*, which is the result of many workshops and meetings that have occurred throughout the process. The intention of the *Strategy* is to provide a strong foundation upon which Saint Paul can move forward in the Central Corridor development process. They invited the audience to ask questions and download the document from the City of Saint Paul website.

Following the presentation:

Julie Causey noted that the document as organized and presented was very visual and accessible. It has lots of detail but is also easy to flip through to get the main ideas. She thanked the Urban Strategies team for its good work. The other task force members all applauded.

Anne White asked the question: how do we get from here to there? She pointed out that the initiatives and regulatory mechanisms suggest a need for cooperation between property owners and businesses (particularly in the case of the midway area) and the problem occurs when individuals prefer to do things in their own interest, which may not be what the community is looking for.

Melanie suggested that a way to deal with this situation may be that when development proposals come in, they need to explain how they fit into the longer term vision, and that the project as proposed would not preclude achieving that longer term vision over time.

George pointed out that the marketplace is ready for the types of development outlined in the *Strategy* and that this is the chance for the community to push development standards and convince people to implement the framework. It is as important to know where development activity is wanted as it is to know where activity is *not* wanted. Deborah Rathman mentioned that the American Institute of Architects will be undertaking a block-by-block initiative to work with property owners on selected blocks to develop concept plans for possible future development. The AIA plan also looks at vacant parcels and community visions to see how a development might fit into its context.

Reggie Aligada stated that the *Strategy* is great because it identifies today's market and explains how it can grow, but he asked what can be done if in ten years it appears we're off track? And are there strategies within the document that are flexible?

Melanie responded by stating that the *Strategy* is meant to be a framework and can help to direct people towards areas that need to be filled in. Jeff Patterson of Colliers International, market analysis subconsultant to Urban Strategies, added his support for an interim overlay district and concept of a Transit Opportunities Zone (from the presentation) and that both of these tools would provide a roadmap for where the corridor can go. The western end of the corridor has already seen a significant amount of activity, with little subsidy. The market will speed up and he anticipates west to east movement along the length of the corridor. George also suggested that there are many other strategies to attract interest and investment in the corridor, such as joint marketing and coordinating festivals and events to show visitors where to go and that there are things to do along the avenue. Melanie added that it's important to especially focus public investments in streetscaping at station areas.

Jim Erkel talked about how the market is tied back to regulations, which can hold the market back in some cases. Erkel suggested a more form-based regulatory approach to promote mixed-use development. He also discussed the narrowness of the corridor and the development pressures on the surrounding neighborhoods.

Melanie responded by saying that Urban Strategies had looked at the City's TN (traditional neighborhood) zoning regulations and decided that they would not get the corridor where it needed/wanted to go. Regulations are needed to promote more of an urban form and she likes the idea of sort of "unzoning," and moving toward a more design-oriented regulation, but that this approach takes a layering of regulation to accomplish. Erkel brought up the Walmart store in Omaha, NE; the city fought the Walmart "formula" and lost because of a lack of regulation.

Seitu Jones mentioned that he would prefer to take a stronger stance on creating an overlay district and wanted to do more with it in the task force's work. More information and detail is needed on the overlay idea. Rathman concurred stating that the overlay would provide another tool to accomplish goals set out by the district councils in their own neighborhood district plans. Shawntera Hardy pointed out that the district plans will be considered and incorporated into the station area planning that will be done in the next phase, and that connection will become clearer as the process moves forward.

Jonathan Sage-Martinson presented an idea for tax breaks or other programs for those located outside the TOZ in an effort to focus resources on the stability areas that are experiencing pressure because of what is happening within the TOZ area. Melanie suggested neighborhood stabilization programs and inclusive housing strategies to help alleviate the pressures felt by secondary areas that are experiencing changes in value, and added that the TOZ area will be more about sites here and there rather than a more consistent "band of need." She also emphasized that

many of the strategies identified in the document really apply to a broader area of the community adjacent to the Corridor, not just the defined TOZ area.

Jerry Hersman asked if the LRT tracks would be raised or imbedded and how that would affect deliveries and snow removal. George said the current proposed design is for the tracks to be imbedded, and that some places may need special design features for truck access, servicing, loading and to simply cross the tracks. These design features will be worked out in the engineering drawings.

Paul Mohrbacher wondered about the experience in other cities in terms of alignment and the places that the LRT serves. The current alignment goes straight through the middle of downtown rather than reaching activities at the edge of downtown. George pointed out that the line in Toronto has expanded 2 or 3 times since it was built as different areas demand service. At this point the idea is to make the walk to the LRT more pleasant by improving streetscapes and encouraging uses at grade. Melanie suggested a circulator bus system as a short term fix, which would be capable of adapting to various service needs. Kristina Smitten mentioned that the downtown taskforce had talked a lot about how to connect the LRT to entertainment opportunities; it needs some creative thinking about how to move people around and get them to the Rice Park area for example. George mentioned that Bryan Bowen had done an informal survey last summer and found that people were only interested in walking 1 ½ blocks. The streets along the LRT line need to be strengthened to encourage more walking.

The following questions, answers and suggestions were made:

- Cluster activities for visitors (media corridor in Toronto).
- A section could be added to the *Strategy* about walking/moving to the entertainment district – Xcel Energy Center, RiverCentre, Science Museum, and the Ordway.
- In times of inclement weather, design features can be used to minimize impact and make the walk more pleasant.
- Public art can be used to get people to walk farther to station areas.
- Area Chambers can be a good resource for implementing way-finding techniques.
- Will transit go to the airport from St. Paul? There are plans in the Metropolitan Council's 2030 plan for a corridor along W. 7th St.; these plans are in the process of being updated.
- How can lanes be removed from city streets and who has the influence to do that? Downtown streets are city streets, how and whether to do this will be decided in preliminary engineering.
- The Central Corridor project is about composition of the Avenue and downtown. There has to be a balance between vehicles, buses and pedestrians; lanes may need to be narrowed or removed to accomplish this goal. Bus stops may need to be moved so that their relationship to LRT is improved.
- Is there an opportunity for a transit center in the "island" created through development of the ring road concept suggested as a possibility for the Snelling-University intersection? A transit center in this situation probably wouldn't be advisable because it would surround pedestrians with vehicles; it's more comfortable for pedestrians to be adjacent to shops along the avenue and create a more comfortable environment there.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Meeting summary prepared by Sarah Zorn, PED planning staff.